

~~ARTICLE APPEARED
IN PAPER~~BOSTON GLOBE
26 February, 1985

CIA, defense unit differ on Soviet arms budget

By Fred Kaplan
Globe Staff

WASHINGTON — A dispute has broken out within the US intelligence community over an assessment of trends in Soviet military spending.

The CIA says Soviet weapons purchases may have risen slightly in 1983, with emphasis on the words "may" and "slightly." Its main conclusion is that the Soviets have not increased spending on weapons systems much at all since 1976.

On the other hand, the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency says Soviet weapons purchases almost certainly rose quite sharply in 1983, and concludes that this marks a new trend toward major boosts in Soviet spending in the future.

This dispute was made public in ironic and almost accidental fashion yesterday, at a Pentagon press conference called to deny reports of a disagreement between the two intelligence agencies.

Last week, Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.) released a CIA study concluding that Soviet military spending had increased by only 2 percent in 1982 and that spending on weapons systems had not increased at all. The study further said this had been the case for each year since 1977.

The estimate has strong political implications. It will certainly be cited by legislators who want to cut the US defense budget, which the Reagan Administration wants to increase next year by 6.6 percent beyond inflation.

Yesterday, US intelligence ana-

lysts — speaking to the press on condition that they not be identified — said the CIA study should not be interpreted to mean that Soviet spending on weapons had declined. Rather, they said, spending had sharply increased from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s and then remained steady at a very high level. Thus, even with no annual growth in arms production, the Soviets could still build a lot of weapons.

This point was made in the CIA study and in most news stories about it.

Upon questioning, however, the analysts disclosed a fairly substantial dispute between the CIA and DIA over Soviet weapons production in 1983. The CIA thinks Soviet spending on weapons for that year, as measured in dollars, probably grew but by no more than 1 or 2 percent. By contrast, the DIA says it grew by 5 to 8 percent.

The CIA study said the view that there had been any growth was "tentative," and offered three possible interpretations of the data. The estimate, based on incomplete data, could be wrong; the level of growth might lie "within the range of the year-to-year fluctuations of the previous six years and does not signify a new trend," or it might indicate a "return to

more rapid growth" in Soviet weapons production.

However, the study strongly suggested the last possibility was the least likely, and said the "stagnation" in arms production may have been a deliberate policy decision by the Kremlin to allocate more resources to the Soviet civilian economy.

The DIA, on the other hand, according to the analysts at yesterday's press conference, believes not only that growth in Soviet weapons spending for 1983 was higher than the CIA believes, but also that the growth marks a resumption of much higher spending by the Soviet military in the years to come.

Both intelligence agencies see evidence of new and expensive Soviet weapons being developed and tested. However, CIA and DIA disagree over when, and how quickly, these new systems will be moved into operation. The analysts say this is the basic source of the dispute.